

Remarks to the Parliament in Dublin, Ireland

April 13, 2023

Well, Mom—[*laughter*—you said it would happen. [*Laughter*]

And, Margot, I apologize to you, little baby girl. The idea you're subject to hearing a President of the United States have to deliver a policy speech—[*laughter*—is as bad as my—all my children have had to been—been put through.

Speaking of my children, my son Hunter is with me. And my best friend in the world, my sister Valerie, is with me today. And I want to thank them. As the proud son of Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden—well, you knew I'd be coming. [*Laughter*]

Speaker, Chair, Taoiseachs all, and I—Deputy Prime Minister, TDs, Senators, people of Ireland: It's so good to be back in Ireland. If you'll forgive the poor attempt at Irish: *Ta me sa bhaile*. I'm at home. I'm at home. I only wish I could stay longer. [*Laughter*]

But I always have a little bit of Ireland close by, even when I'm in Washington. In the Oval Office, I have the rugby ball signed by the Irish rugby team, the ball the team played when they beat the All Blacks in Dublin in 2021. [*Laughter*]

And by the way, my cousin, one of Ireland's greatest rugby stars, Rob Kearney, brought it to DC on St. Patrick's Day in 2022 to give me. And I didn't play rugby except when I was out of school—out of law school. And I didn't play it very well. We played at a rugby club.

But I did play American football and a few other sports. But I realized that, you know, you guys are all nuts. [*Laughter*] You know, but the interesting thing is, I'd rather have my children playing rugby now, for health reasons, than I would have them playing football. Fewer people get hurt playing rugby. And you have no equipment, you have 280-pound guys like we do—[*laughter*—and you just don't hit each other in the head very often.

And—but at any rate, all kidding aside, I—in 2016, I came to Ireland as Vice President, bringing most of my family with me: my sister Valerie, my brother Jimmy, my daughter, and my five granddaughters—and grandchildren. And my granddaughters are crazy about me, I might add—[*laughter*—because I talk to them every single day; I send them a note.

Together, we explored our family history, visiting the Cooley Peninsula—where the Finnegan's ancestors earned their living on land and in sea—and walking the streets of Ballina, where my great-great-great-Grandfather Blewitt lived with his family before relocating in 1851, eventually settling in my hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Yesterday, I returned to County Louth, where I toured the Carlingford Castle, likely one of the last glimpses of Ireland my Finnegan ancestors saw as they gazed on their way out in what, in those days, was referred to as a "coffin ship." And they sailed out of Newry in 1850.

I wasn't going to say this, but I'll say it anyway. The idea was—I later learned from the Irish Times—they did some—a little background check, and my good friend Barack Obama—and he is my good friend—his grandfather was a shoemaker like mine; sailed 5 weeks earlier from the same port. The idea they both sailed for a new life and thought their grandchildren—their great-great-grandsons would both be President, I think, is really a little bit of Irish malarkey. [*Applause*] But it's kind of interesting, isn't it?

Tomorrow I will also revisit County Mayo and remember the history and hope and the heartbreak my Blewitt ancestors must have felt leaving their beloved homeland to begin their new lives in America.

I say all this not to wax poetic about bygone days, but because of the story of my family's journey—and those who left and those who stayed—is emblematic of the stories of so many Irish and American families, not just Irish American families. And these stories are the very heart of what binds Ireland and America together. They speak to a history defined by our dreams. They speak to a present written by our shared responsibility. And they speak to a future poised for unlimited, shared possibilities.

So today I'd like to reflect on the enduring strength of the connections between Ireland and the United States, a partnership for the ages. It begins in our shared history, dating back to the very founding of the United States. The Irish hearts that helped kindle the torch of liberty in my country and fire its revolutionary spirit. The Irish blood from across this island that was willingly given for my country's independence. The Irish hands that laid the foundations of a new kind of future, one from the bottom up and the middle out, one built on freedom.

You know, the great waves of immigration that brought our ancestors to the United States in succeeding decades carried millions more Irishmen across the sea. Most of them arrived with little more than with hope in their hearts and strength of their dreams and beautiful memories of an emerald green isle, a home they would never fully leave behind.

I've never met an Irishman in America who doesn't think he—hope he can see Ireland someday. You know, their sweet—or, excuse me, their sweat is soaked with the foundations of communities across the Nation. All across America. You can't go anywhere and not find it.

By the way, Tip O'Neill, the former Speaker of the House, used to say that he'd have a—he'd have a reception for all the Irish in the Congress, the House and the Senate, and all those who wished they were Irish. *[Laughter]* And everybody showed up. *[Laughter]*

Look, the journeys of our ancestors expanded our horizons and, literally, they excited our imaginations. They became the untiring backbone of America's progress as a nation, even as they endured discrimination and they were denied opportunity.

I'll tell you a story. I was campaigning for President, and I was out in Colorado. And I was with a man whose family had been—he was a former Senator—a man whose family had been in the United States since the conquistadors, for generations. And he kept—and there were a whole lot of people standing across the refurbished rail station in western—excuse me—in eastern Colorado. And there were literally 10,000 people on the other side of the track waiting to hear me speak.

And he kept saying, "Now, Joe, remember—remember—these people are not—these are my people. They're Hispanics. They're not used to being taken—you got to show respect and"—I said, "I understand," and kept—kept it up.

Finally, I turned—this is the God's truth—this refurbished train station—okay?—it had, like, linen, kind of, wallpaper on it. And about every 20 feet, there was a brass plaque that's saying, "No Irish Allowed." I said: "I get it. I get it." But it's history that speaks, above all, to the values that sustained these people throughout their hardships in their lives. Freedom. Equality. Dignity. Family. Courage.

My mom used to have an expression. She'd say, "Joey, courage is the greatest virtue of all, for without courage, you can't love with abandon." Without courage, you cannot love with abandon. These are the values that were handed down generation-to-generation in my family, grafted onto the American character, tended as they transformed an entire nation.

Like so many countries around the world, though perhaps more than most, the United States was shaped by Ireland. And that's not hyperbole; that's a fact. And the values we share remain, to this day, the core of our historic partnership between our people and our governments.

As nations, we've known hardship and division, but we've also found solace and sympathy in one another. And just 4 years before we issued our Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin came to the Irish Parliament and declared—and described it as, I quote, "disposed to be friends of America." End of quote.

In turn, the next Ireland—in turn, the text of Ireland's 1916 Proclamation displayed mainly in the main foyer of this building draws on the support of Ireland's "exiled children in America." The quote. Draws on the support of "exiled children in America."

We're nations that know what it means to persevere for freedom, to brave a civil war, to toil in the vineyards of democracy. And that's, again, not hyperbole; it's a fact. It's a fact. It's not just the hope, but the conviction that better days lie ahead, that brought us along. We have the power to build a better future.

Sixty years ago, as referenced, the first Irish Catholic President of the United States made a historic trip here, speaking to this assembly and capturing the imaginations of Irish and Irish American families alike.

When John Kennedy addressed Parliament, he honored the more than 150,000 Irish immigrants who joined the Army of the North during America's Civil War. And among them, one or two of them were my relatives as well.

They signed up in a new land to stand for old values, to defend freedom and the dignity of all people. Think about this. Name me another country, in whatever their language is, that use the word "dignity" as much as we Irish use the word "dignity." It matters. My dad used to say, "Everybody, Joey—everybody"—and he meant it—"is entitled to be treated with dignity, no matter who they are."

President Kennedy honored their courage and sacrifice by presenting to this body the flag of the Irish Brigade, which hangs out here to this very day. Likewise, I was honored to receive an Irish flag from the Taoiseach during the recent St. Patrick's Day celebration in Washington. It was flown to commemorate the Irish who first raised the Tricolour in Ireland 175 years ago and who suppose—subsequently made his way to America where he led the Irish Brigade in that Civil War—that Civil War battle.

These like symbols, holding places of honor at Leinster House and the White House, embody a century of history between our countries—connections that irrevocably have shaped the understanding of the world and our hope that we put in it.

Our history reminds us—our history, ours—yours and mine—reminds us of the responsibilities we have to the president—excuse me, to the present, to the hopes of our ancestors, to the expectation of future generations. Because you know what it means to fight for democracy. Today, Ireland and the United States are standing together to oppose Russia's brutal aggression and support the brave people of Ukraine. I spent many days in Ukraine.

President Kennedy said 60 years ago, and I quote, "Ireland pursues an independent course in foreign policy, but it is not neutral between liberty and tyranny, and it never will be." Thank you for that. Over the past year, Ireland has proved him right. And the Speaker said Ireland has stood proudly with the United States and partners around the world for liberty, against tyranny.

Ireland has committed more than 170 million euros in nonlethal aid to Ukraine, including vital protective gear, medical equipment, humanitarian support, and aid to minimize the impacts of war on food insecurity and child malnutrition. You don't forget; you have memories that go

deep. And as a member of the European Union, Ireland is working together with the United States and other partners to hold Russia accountable for its actions, including through significant sanctions and export control.

I've known Putin for over 25 years. Putin thought the world would look the other way, was confident he would break NATO and the European Union; the unity of Western nations would fracture and fall at the moment of testing. That's what he thought. But he was wrong. He was wrong on every point, on every front.

Today, we're more united and more determined than ever to defend the values that make us strong. And I want to sincerely thank you for Ireland's vital leadership last year in the U.S.—in the U.N. Security Council. Working together, Ireland and the United States helped change the way the U.N. sanctions are implemented to ensure they do not hamper humanitarian efforts. The new humanitarian carve-out will make sanctions more effective and save lives. Ireland's support for Ukraine is especially meaningful because you carry the moral authority with nations around the world.

Ireland has always been a voice for liberty, global cooperation, and equality of all mankind. Because Ireland remembers the terrible cost of war, you have built an international credibility as peacekeepers, stepping up continuously to serve in the U.N. peacekeeping missions since Ireland's first development—since Ireland's first deployment in 1958.

Because Ireland remembers what it means to have to flee home, leaving everything behind to begin again on foreign shores, the Irish people have generously opened their hearts, their homes, and you've welcomed, as you've said, nearly 80,000—nearly 80,000—Ukrainian refugees. I would argue, the rest of the world has an obligation to help you maintain that as well. Because Ireland remembers how painful hollows of the Great Hunger. And you're today a global leader in food security as well.

Ireland has committed fully 20 percent of your aid budget to fighting global hunger. And in a moment where people around the world are struggling with the economic fallout of the pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine, Ireland is growing its aid budget and expanding its commitment to help vulnerable people, especially partner nations across Africa. I particularly want to thank you for stepping up alongside the United States to help UNICEF and the World Health Organization fight malnutrition and child wasting.

Ireland's contribution of 50 million euros is helping prevent the—and treat wasting—child wasting—and supply ready-to-use therapeutic foods and reach a half a million children in Africa. A half a million children. You're changing lives.

Ireland also remembers, as I do, that peace is indispensable. Peace is the necessary foundation for progress, for growth, for unlocking the enormous potential that exists in every part of this island. This week marks a vital milestone for peace: 25 years ago, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Twenty-five years ago.

One of my best friends in the Senate, and a great, great friend to this day, is George Mitchell. As he said, "There were 300 days of failure"—or "700 days of failure and 1 day of success." But it was a success that 1 day. But more is to be done.

Yesterday I was in Belfast to honor those who commit themselves to peace, to reiterate the enduring support of the United States for the Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland's democratic institutions and to help accelerate the enormous economic growth that is opening new futures for young people in Northern Ireland.

As I pointed out, there are literally hundreds of American corporations ready to come and invest—invest—but they're cautious because the institutions are not in place.

We must never forget that peace, even as has become a lived reality for an entire generation of young people, peace is precious. It still needs its champions. It still needs to be nurtured.

The Good Friday Agreement didn't change—just change lives for the better in Northern Ireland. It had significant positive impacts across the Republic of Ireland as well.

As the Taoiseach and I have discussed, including last month in Washington and again today, how Ireland and the United States can work together with the United Kingdom and the European Union to support the people of Northern Ireland.

I think—I think—that the United Kingdom should be working closer with Ireland in this effort—in this endeavor. Political violence must never again be allowed to take hold in this island. Presumptuous of me to say from the United States, but that must be the goal which guides us in all our efforts.

Because the greatest peace dividend of the Good Friday Agreement is an entire generation of young people—an entire generation of young people—whose hearts have been shaped not by grievances of the past, but by confidence that there are no checkpoints on their dreams. They're writing a new future, a future of unlimited possibilities.

For too long, Ireland has talked about in the past tense. We tell old stories of days gone by because it is good to remember—stories of Irish grit and genius, saints and scholars, poets and politicians. And in the face of it—they're good stories, on its face. Let's face it.

But, as the poet Boland wrote in her poem "Mother Ireland," she said:

I['ve] learned my name.
I rise—I rose up. I remembered it.
Now—now I could tell my story.
It was different
from the [stories] told about me.

End of quote.

Today, Ireland's story is no one's to tell but its own. But the United States will be your closest partner, your most dependable partner, and your most enthusiastic supporter of every step of the way, I promise you. We've always been—and we've been together.

And we're going to continue to grow our enormous economic relationship as a foundation for both our nations' prosperity. We're going to continue to strengthen our economies, building them from the bottom up and the middle out.

Yesterday and always—already Ireland draws a disproportionate amount of the foreign direct investment from the United States of America. And the same is true for Ireland's investment into the United States of America, which is the ninth—most significant investment of any nation in the world in America. You know, we share more than \$1 trillion in bilateral trade and investment in 2021.

More than 950 American companies—international companies—have international headquarters in Ireland, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. Seven hundred Irish companies located in 50 States employ more than 100,000 people in the United States of America. And together, Ireland and the United States are building a future of greater economic dignity, one where rights of workers are respected and corporations pay their fair share.

The global minimum tax will continue fair competition for investment while creating benefits for all our people. And I have no doubt that the thriving economic relationship between our countries is going to continue to grow. I'm grateful for Ireland's partnership in delivering the game-changing—this game-changing international agreement.

Similarly, the deep connection that has always existed between our people and the land has translated into a commitment to fight climate crisis to preserve our planet for future generations. The single existential threat to the world is climate change. We don't have a lot of time, and that's a fact. And even recognizing—finally, everyone is recognizing it in America.

I've flown over more territory in the United States since I've been President, in a helicopter, that has been burned to the ground than comprises the entire State of Maryland. The—equal to the entire State of Maryland.

Ireland's famous 40 shades of green are being supplemented by green energy, green agriculture, green jobs.

And make no mistake, the entire world sees and is drawn to the opportunities that exist on this island: the skilled workers, the high-tech infrastructure, the innovators who are breaking barriers, the connection and kinship you share not just with the United States, but with the countries around the globe.

I know you all know it, but maybe sometimes we forget it. Ireland is a hotbed of cutting-edge science, research, and emerging technologies that's going to influence so much of our shared future. For real.

Working in partnership with Ireland, the United States, together with the European Union and likeminded parties around the world, are going to ensure that those technologies are grounded in the same core values we have championed for so long: democracy, human rights, freedom of opportunity for everyone—not just for some, for everyone.

You know, I hadn't planned on running for President again in 2020. My son Beau, who had just died of stage 4 glioblastoma after coming back from Iraq after a year. He was the attorney general of Delaware. As a matter of fact, he should be the one standing here giving this speech to you.

But you know, I started to write a book talking about how technology has always changed the world and we were at an inflection point in the world. And the technology was changing so rapidly and things were changing so significantly that it wasn't so much who lead any country, it was the changes that are just happening and at an incredible speed. Incredible speed. Look what's happening with artificial intelligence right now. It holds enormous promise and enormous concern.

Our world stands at an inflection point where the choices we make today are literally going to determine the future or the history of this world for the next four to five decades, literally, not figuratively. We're at one of those points.

I had a professor at school who said: "An inflection point is when you're riding down the highway at 60 miles an hour and you make a radical turn six degrees in one direction. You can never get back on the course you're on." That's where we are as a world.

And as we meet these ageless struggles, they continue to cast a shadow on our world: the struggle between the rights of many and the desires of a few; between liberty and oppression; and I know I get criticized for saying this around the world, but between democracy and autocracy. It is a competition that's real.

And we're called to this work just as every generation before us has been. In this moment, the world needs Ireland, and the United States, and our limitless imaginations.

I met more with Xi Jinping than any world leader has over the last 10 years. Over—excuse me, 91 hours of just one-on-one conversations—68 in-person. I've traveled 17,000 miles with him through Asia primarily and through China. He once asked me on the Tibetan Plateau—he said,

"Can you define America for me?" This is the God's truth. I said, "Yes, I can—in one word." But if he asked me about Ireland, I could have said the same thing. "One word: possibilities."

We believe anything is possible if we set our mind to it and we do it together. This is the United States of America and Ireland. There's nothing beyond our capacity if we do it together. And we've got to believe that. We've got to know that because that's the history of both our countries.

This is about defending the values handed down to us by our ancestors, keeping the flame of freedom we inherited—the beacon that's going to guide our children and our grandchildren. It's a struggle we have to—we're fit to fight together.

Now, how is Ireland and the United States—now is their time to meet every challenge together. I really mean this. To raise together—to rise up in our joys and our triumphs. To preserve together and persevere through sorrows and setbacks. To dream together over horizons we can't see. And to build together a future that may be, that doesn't exist. A future that can be.

You know, as was mentioned, today is Seamus Heaney's birthday. And I was always quoting Irish poetry in the United States Senate over my career. That's a long career of 36 years. *[Laughter]* And my colleagues always thought I did it because I was Irish. That's not the reason. You're the best poets in the world. That's the reason I did it. *[Laughter]*

And one of the best among them was your husband. And thank you for sending me that autographed copy. It was your husband.

And my favorite poem—my favorite poem was "The Cure at Troy." And it goes—you all know the words. You know it—you just heard it so many times. He wrote:

. . . don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
[That] longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

It's everything I've been taught. Rise up. We've, in the past, made hope and history rhyme.

So today, ladies and gentlemen, as we celebrate the enduring partnership between our nations, our shared past, our present, let's set our eyes squarely on the future. Let's harness what's best in us: our courage, our creativity, our loyalty, our tenacity, and our loyalty again. Let's once more, for our generation and generations to come, strive to make hope and history rhyme.

Because I've never been more optimistic about the future than I am today. And I'm at the end of my career, not the beginning.

The only thing I bring to this career after my aged—as you can see how old I am—*[laughter]*—but is a little bit of wisdom. I come to the job with more experience than any President in American history. It doesn't make me better or worse, but it gives me few excuses. *[Laughter]*

So, folks, this is one of the great honors of my career—got to be here today. And I mean it from the bottom of my heart. You have no idea what this—my greatest regret, and I'm going to sound like a kid, but—is, my mom is not here to hear it. My greatest regret, as my Grandfather Finnegan, who was an Irish American, whose grandfather was Owen Finnegan, who made the effort—and he was a great athlete and went to Santa Clara University. And he was a newspaper guy on the business side.

And I never understood what he meant when he said, "Joey, I worry about you." He'd lean over. [Laughter] I said, "Pop, what do you worry about?" He said, "You're too much—you're too much like that guy who led the revolution."

He said of the guy who was a Prime Minister—he said: "You've got to be less like the military guy. They shot him." [Laughter] "Be more like—be more like de Valera." [Laughter] Well, I'd never—but, folks, I really mean it: We can do so much. We really—God, we—we can.

And it doesn't even break down in ideology. It breaks down in faith in ourselves, our values. Because no matter what party we belong to, our values are the same.

It's about honesty and dignity, justice. And you all have every ingredient to make it work.

It's an honor to be here. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:56 p.m. at Leinster House. In his remarks, he referred to Margot Moynihan, infant daughter of Sen. Rebecca Moynihan of Ireland; Speaker of the Dáil Éireann (Lower Chamber) Seán Ó Fearghaíl; Speaker of the Seanad Éireann (Upper Chamber) Jerry Buttimer; Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, former Prime Ministers John Bruton, Bertie Ahern, Brian Cowen, and Enda Kenny, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence Micheál Martin, in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, of Ireland; U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Kenneth L. Salazar, in his former capacity as a U.S. Senator; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; former U.S. Sen. George J. Mitchell, in his former capacity as U.S. Special Envoy to Northern Ireland; President Xi Jinping of China; and Marie Heaney, wife of Irish poet Seamus Heaney. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and grandchildren R. Hunter, Natalie, Finnegan, Naomi, and Roberta "Maisy" Biden.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Parliament in Dublin, Ireland.

Locations: Dublin, Ireland.

Names: Ahern, Bertie; Biden, Ashley; Biden, Finnegan J.; Biden, James B.; Biden, Naomi K.; Biden, Natalie P.; Biden, R. Hunter; Biden, R. Hunter, II; Biden, Roberta M. "Maisy"; Bruton, John; Buttimer, Jerry; Cowen, Brian; Heaney, Marie; Kearney, Rob; Kenny, Edna; Martin, Micheál; Mitchell, George J.; Moynihan, Margot; Ó Fearghaíl Seán; Obama, Barack; Owens, Valerie Biden; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Varadkar, Leo; Xi Jinping.

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